

Learn to Weave Tape

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About weaving

This is an extremely high level overview. Weaving can be as complex as you want it to be, with thousands of variations. Today we're going to get you started with one type to see if you want to dig deeper.

At its core, weaving is very simple. You have a series of string in one direction. You then thread another bit of string perpendicular to the first, going over and under the threads. I say string, but you can use anything malleable enough. Basketry, a type of weaving, uses reeds, rushes, or thin strips of wood. You don't need a loom to weave.

However, to manage dozens, or hundreds, or thousands of threads that are many yards in length, a loom is very useful. A loom, first and foremost, controls and manages the warp. Warp are the threads that go the long way. A loom keeps these long threads under tension and in order. Fancier looms give you a way to wrap a long warp in a compact way so that you can work with yards and yards of warp in a smallish space.

The second thing a loom can do is provide a way to raise and lower warp threads in a pattern you need. Basic looms raise every other thread so that it's easier to pass your other thread, the weft or woof, back and forth.

In general, the goal of weaving is cloth. There are many different types of cloth, and numerous types of looms that are designed for creating these different types of cloth. We're just going to dip our toe in.

One categorization of cloth types is based on which part of the weaving is visible. Most cloth that you think of, like a table cloth or what you're wearing is called "even weave". This means the warp and weft are equally visible. There is also "Weft faced" cloth, where the weft is most visible. If you ever did a bit of weaving with string on cardboard as a kid, or most types of 'tapestry' weaving, that's weft-faced. The third type is "Warp faced", where the warp is mostly visible. That's most likely what we'll end up making today.

What is Tape?

There is actually something called a "Tape loom", but tape is a general term for a narrow, weft faced band of weaving. Today, tapes are usually woven on an inkle loom. If you use heavier yarns, a tape is sturdy enough to be a belt. If you use finer yarns, a tape becomes a shoe lace. If you use really nice yarns and are very skilled, you can make ribbon.

Heddles and Sheds

Today we are going to work with a style of loom called “Rigid Heddle”. A rigid heddle is a board with slots and holes. These slots and holes are evenly spaced in your heddle. Every other thread is in a slot, every other thread is in a hole. The threads through the slots stay still. The threads through the holes go up and down as you raise and lower the heddle.

(Inkle looms are an exception. Inkle looms are still a rigid heddle, but they work backwards. Every other thread is held still with a loop of string. You raise and lower the threads not held by strings.)

When you raise your heddle, every other thread is up, so you get a sort of V-shape. This is called a shed. When your shed is open, you toss your weft thread through. Your weft thread can be wrapped around a fancy stick of wood called a shuttle to make it easier. You then lower your heddle, which makes another shed. Now the threads that are in the slots are on top. You toss your weft thread through.

With a heddle, instead of manually passing your weft over-under, over-under, and then on the return pass, under-over, under-over, raising and lowering the heddle automagically gets you the over-under (or under-over) shed.

Beating

Weaving ends up having all sorts of fun terms, like beating. There are also weaving swords, too.

Beating is a gentle tapping of the shed and weft to make it even. You can use a shuttle or a stick. If you tap loosely, you will have a large “pick”. If you tap/pull down tightly, you will have a small pick. The combination of how tightly you beat and how loose/tight you wrap your weft back and forth can change the nature of your fabric. In general, if your beat and weft are loose, you will tend towards a more even weave to weft faced fabric. If both are tight, on this style loom, you end up with warp faced fabric.

Selvages

Getting good selvages takes practice. Do not get discouraged! I’ve been weaving off and on for 35+ years, and I still have issues with my selvages.

Selvages are your edges of your weaving. If you’ve ever made clothes, your selvedge edge is usually a bit different from where the cloth was cut.

As you practice weaving, you want to have even selvages. The selvedge is where your weft thread wraps around to make the next pick. You want it tight enough to keep your fabric the way you want it. Too tight, and your cloth will squash in. Too loose and your cloth will be too gauzy. If you’re not even, your tape will be...wobbly.

Patterns

There are many, many fabulous websites and books out there with hundreds of patterns for tapes.

With the simple band we're going to do, you have two sheds to work with. If you're using one of my popsicle stick heddles, you have 8 holes and up to 10 slots (you can have yarn outside the heddles).

Horizontal Stripes

										Holes
										Slots

Vertical Stripes

										Holes
										Slots

Checks

										Holes
										Slots

Warping

Many, many people are scared of warping. There's no need to be. Warping is a necessary part of weaving. It is best to accept it and grow to like it, because you can't weave without warping.

Warping involves three things:

1. Cutting your warp threads to the same length.
2. Getting your warp threads onto your loom under tension without tangling.
3. Threading your warp through your heddle.

If you are using a popsicle stick heddle, pick a length. Double arms length is decent, and something you can measure by yourself. That should make you a belt length. If you just want to sample, A single arms length will work and you can make a bookmark or pouch drawstring.

- ❖ If you have an inkle loom, you do steps one and two at the same time by just wrapping around your pegs under even tension.

If you are using multiple colors, your choice if you warp in order or just do one color at a time. If you tangle the colors, you might have a little more loom waste or have some untangling to do.

After cutting your warp threads to the same length, thread them through your heddles in order according to your pattern. Then make all your ends even and tie a knot.

- ❖ Add your heddles by looping them around the threads and the heddle peg.

Tie the knot to something firm. You're going to be pulling against it. Then stretch your warp back from this, bringing your heddle along with you. Wrap a cord/belt around yourself and attach it to the end of your warp. Lean/scoot back until it is under tension.

- ❖ Adjust your tension until it is taut.

Filling a shuttle

If you have a shuttle, wrap yarn around it.

If you do not have a shuttle, make a butterfly.

Weaving

1. Confirm your warp is under tension.
2. Raise your shed.
3. Pass your weft through.
Pick a direction. Always go that way when the shed is in this position.
4. Lower your shed.
5. Beat.
6. Pass your weft through the other way.
7. Raise your shed.
8. Beat.
9. Repeat from step 3.

Continue this until you can't easily reach your heddle any more. Then "advance your warp"

Untie the knot at your waist, slide it up some, and tie it back on.

- ❖ Loosen tension, slide your warp, tighten tension.

Ta-dah! You are weaving!

The rest of this is practice. You have to teach your body and hands what's right to get the cloth you want.

In general:

- Keep your beat even.
- Keep your selvages even.
- Keep your tension even.

Three simple sentences, but can take a lifetime to master.

Adding new weft

When you run out of weft, add in a new piece, and weave with two weft threads for a few picks to lock in the new weft. Then trim the loose edges.

Finishing

There are whole books written on how to finish weaving. With tapes there are usually two options:

- Tie a big knot (great for belts)
- Tie your warp threads together two by two.

Resources

Some free references from the web (I do not vouch for quality)

Free instructions for weaving on an inkle loom: <http://www.earthguild.com/products/riff/rinkle.htm>

Inkle Weaving by Naomi Binsfeld: <http://schachtspindle.com/pdfs/inkle-manual.pdf>

(The Schacht Spindle company also makes inkle looms, and spindles, spinning wheels, and other looms)

How to weave on the Inkle Loom by Mary A Atwater:

https://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/monographs/amm_inkl.pdf

Backstrap weaving: <https://backstrapweaving.wordpress.com/backstrap-basics-an-article-from-weavezine-by-laverne-waddington/>

Popsicle stick heddle diagrams: <http://bobscrafts.com/bobstuff/backstrp.htm>

Interweave press is a company that publishes a lot of craft magazines. They publish Handwoven, a magazine dedicated to weaving. They also produce a ton of books and videos on the subject (and many other crafts as well). If you learn well from videos, they have a ton of them, and decent articles, etc.

<http://www.interweavestore.com/weaving>

Collection of free inkle band patterns: <https://www.weavolution.com/group/inkle-tablet-weaving/free-patterns-inkle-or-tablet-10874>

The Weaver's Inkle Pattern Directory by Ann Dixon <http://www.interweavestore.com/weavers-inkle-pattern-directory> This gets into the fancy pick up bands, but they're so pretty, I can't not include it.